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THE DES MOINES PLAN OF CITY GOVERNMENT

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Since the discussion this afternoon centers about the newer institutional forms of democracy, I shall not in this paper attempt to exploit the Des Moines plan of city government as a method of municipal reform or as a solution of the problems of city administration. My purpose will be simply to point out such of the newer institutional forms of democracy as are expressed in "An act to provide for the government of certain cities," recently passed by the general assembly of Iowa and applicable to all cities of the first-class in that State, having a population of 25,000 or over.

Having been originally brought forward and urged by the people of the city of Des Moines, the system of government outlined in the act of the general assembly has come to be known generally as "The Des Moines Plan of City Government." It has already been adopted by two of the leading cities of the State, namely; Des Moines and Cedar Rapids—but organization under the new system has not yet been effected in either place.

The Des Moines plan is of course not an altogether unique system of municipal government. It is simply a new edition of the more familiar commission plan; or, it is the Galveston plan revised. Briefly it provides for the government of the city by a council consisting of a mayor and four councilmen who are vested with

all executive, legislative and judicial powers and duties now had possessed and exercised by the mayor, city council, board of public works, park commissioners, board of police and fire commissioners, board of water-works trustees, board of library trustees, solicitor, assessor, treasurer, auditor, city engineer, and other executive and administrative officers in cities of the first-class.

Furthermore, the executive and administrative powers and duties are distributed among five departments designated respectively as: department of public affairs; department of accounts and finances; department of public safety; department of streets and public improve-

ments; and department of parks and public property. And, moreover, each member of the council is required to serve as superintendent of a department.

The members of the council are chosen by the electorate of the city. But all other officers and assistants (including a city clerk, a solicitor, an assessor, a treasurer, an auditor, a civil engineer, a city physician, a marshal, a chief of fire department, a market master, a street commissioner, and three library trustees) are elected or appointed by the council and subject to removal at any time by the same authority. It is also provided that the council shall appoint three civil service commissioners who under the direction of the council are required to perform the usual duties prescribed for such civil service commissioners.

Turning now to the newer institutional forms of democracy as expressed in the act of the general assembly of Iowa the following deserve mention:

1. Upon the petition of twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate the Des Moines plan of government is submitted in cities of the first-class to a direct vote of the people for adoption or rejection. And similarly upon petition a vote may be secured upon abandonment of the plan at any time after it has been in operation for six years.

2. The mayor and four councilmen are nominated by a general non-partisan primary election, that is, they are nominated by the electorate at large at a primary election in which ballots are used containing no party marks whatsoever. And these same officers are elected biennially at large, that is, on a general ticket.

3. The members of the council may be removed or recalled at any time by the electorate. For it is provided that upon the petition of twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate the question of the removal of the incumbent of any elective office is submitted to a direct vote of the people.

4. Proposed ordinances may be submitted to the council through petition from the electorate; and such proposed ordinances, if not passed by the council, are submitted without alteration to a direct vote of the people. Furthermore, ordinances proposed by petition or which have been adopted by a vote of the people may not be repealed or amended except by a vote of the people.

5. No ordinance passed by the council (except in certain cases particularly mentioned) "shall go into effect before ten days from the

time of its final passage;" and if during said ten days a petition signed by at least twenty-five per centum of the voting electorate is presented to the council protesting against the passage of such ordinance the same shall be suspended from going into operation and it shall be the duty of the council to reconsider such ordinance, and if the same is not entirely repealed it shall be submitted by the council to a direct vote of the people.

6. "Every ordinance or resolution appropriating money or ordering any street improvement or sewer, or making or authorizing the making of any contract, or granting of any franchise or right to occupy or use the streets, highways, bridges or public places in the city for any purpose, shall be complete in the form in which it is finally passed, and remain on file with the city clerk for public inspection at least one week before the final passage or adoption." Moreover, "every franchise or grant for interurban or street railways, gas or water-works, electric light or power plants, heating plants, telegraph or telephone systems or other public service utilities within [the] city, must be authorized or approved" by a direct vote of the people.

7. All meetings of the council at which any person not a city officer is admitted shall be open to the public.

8. The council is required each month to print in pamphlet form for distribution a detailed itemized statement of all receipts and expenditures of the city along with a summary of its proceedings during the preceding month. And at the end of each year the council shall provide for a complete examination of all books and accounts of the city by competent accountants and shall publish the results of all such examinations.

Thus it is seen (to summarize) that in the Des Moines plan of city government the democratic idea of government in accord with the will of the people has been institutionalized by *first* centralizing all powers and authority in a council of five men and *then* making that council directly responsible and accountable to the electorate for the faithful performance of their duties in accordance with the desires of the people through these newer institutional forms of democracy, namely:

1. The non-partisan primary.
2. The election of officers at large, i. e., on a general ticket.
3. The recall.
4. The initiative.

5. The referendum.
6. The veto or protest.
7. The publicity of all business.
8. The expert examination of all books and accounts.